



JOHN HART,  
*the celebrated Robber. Aged 29 Years.*

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MEMOIR  
OF THE LIFE OF  
**JOHN HART,**  
*The celebrated Robber,*

Who was executed in Quebec, on the Tenth day of  
November, 1826 ; for having been convicted

*Of the Robbery of the*

ROMAN CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL  
OF THAT CITY.

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" My day is closed : the gloom of night is come !  
A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate."

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JOHN HART was born in 1797, at Frederickton, New-Brunswick, of English parents, and the youngest of six children. At the age of ten years he was received into the 104th Regiment, as drummer, and continued in that station for nearly eleven years, during which time his conduct was generally good. In 1817, the regiment being disbanded, Hart enlisted into the 76th, and continued therein until 1820 ; in this regiment he was very unfortunate, having received between six and seven hundred lashes, in consequence of striking sergeants and corporals—for these and other offences, he was discharged in Quebec, and again set at full liberty on the world. Having a wish to see his parents, he resolved once more to visit his native place, and with that intention went on board a schooner in his regimentals, and agreed to work his passage home. Shortly after going on board, the

Captain set him to tar ropes on the rigging, with which occupation, Hart soon became dissatisfied, and quickly took his leave of a sailor's life, having been only four days in the service. Up to this period, he said, he had never been guilty of any crime, save that of striking some of the petty and insulting officers in the last-mentioned regiment. His temper, which was naturally quick and fiery, could not brook insolence from any individual, and consequently, poor Hart was often led into many difficulties. His prospects of returning to New-Brunswick being laid aside, he prepared to push his way to Upper Canada, and with that intention, proceeded as far as New Liverpool, where he wrought for nine days, and then returned to Quebec, where he commenced at large all species of profligacy, vice and wickedness. The first crime of which he was ever guilty was the stealing of a Scotch bonnet, from Mr. Young in the Lower Town of Quebec, under the following circumstances.

One day, meeting with John Robinson, an Englishman, with whom he was but slightly acquainted, Robinson asked him if he had got any money, to which Hart replied, that he had a little, and would freely share it with him; upon this, they went into a tavern, and there spent what trifle he possessed, in eating and drinking. On leaving the tavern, Robinson discovered a Scotch bonnet hanging at Mr. Young's door, and instantly encouraged Hart to steal it; in the mean time handing him a pen-knife to cut the cord by which it was suspended, adding, that it would get them a few shillings to procure something more to eat and drink. Hart readily complied, and succeeded in taking the bonnet, which he shortly after sold for three shillings, to a negro, on board a vessel lying at the King's Wharf. This done, they immediately went to another tavern, where they mutually participated of some more refreshment, which the recent booty had procured them. Here, while Hart was contending with a man about some trifling circumstance, Robinson slept out, and went directly to Mr. Young, and asked him if he had lately lost any thing. Mr. Young said, he could not immediately tell. Robinson bade him look whether he had not lost a Scotch bonnet, which Mr. Young found was really true. Robinson then asked Mr. Y. what he would give

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him, if he would tell who the person was that took it. Mr. Young said, the cap was not of much value, but he would instantly make him a prisoner if he did not immediately tell who the individual was that had taken it. Robinson finding his situation more precarious than he had anticipated, readily agreed, and quickly conducted him to the house where he had left Hart, and soon pointed him out as the guilty individual. He was then taken before a Magistrate, and Robinson appeared as his accuser; the case being investigated, Robinson was also considered guilty, and they were both sentenced to the House of Correction for two months. After having spent two months in gaol, he was again set at liberty, without one penny to line his pocket. Hart resolved not to remain long moneyless, and consequently prepared himself for the first chance that should offer to relieve his wants; with these impressions on his mind, he was passing the provision guard-room, when the sentry cried, "guard, turn out!"—he then entered the room, for the purpose of lighting his pipe, when his ear caught the ticking of a watch; this he thought was no unlucky hit, and he quickly seized it, and then stepped off.

Thinking himself quite secure, he indifferently went to the next guard-room, having previously sold the watch, and with part of the money procured a bottle of spirits, which he very liberally shared with the sentry. Hart had scarcely finished the beverage, when the former guard came up, and apprehended him for stealing the watch; they very soon eased his pocket of the ill-gotten load, and without further ceremony, than that which springs from the point of the bayonet, speedily lodged him once more in the body of the gaol. He was tried, found guilty, publicly whipped in the market-place, and sentenced to six months close confinement.

Shortly after leaving gaol he became acquainted with an American girl, with whom he first commenced his love concerns; he was now in love, and in want, houseless and pennyless. This was a condition not easily to be borne. Wandering about the streets with his blooming spouse, he fortunately discovered an empty house, and soon resolved to enter and take possession. They did so, and struck up a fire, spending the night as happily as lovers

in such a situation could possibly be supposed to do. They continued in this vacant house till the following night, when Hart and another companion of his found means of procuring a stove to warm their silent abode. They started out, leaving the American girl alone, in possession of their new dwelling. Hart was then directed by his companion to a house belonging to Mr. Phillips, in which there was a good stove and pipes; they unlocked the door with a key fitted for that purpose, and straightway carried them to their cold habitation. They quickly erected the stove, kindled a fire, and spent that night more comfortably than the former. Day having arrived they began to think how they should manage to obtain some food, knowing that they wanted but little to eat, plenty to drink and then they could sleep for nothing. The only remedy that seemed to offer was to pawn their stove, this they did, and thereby procured a temporary refreshment. Having some other little articles which they had brought with them, when taking the stove, Hart started to Saint Roc with them, leaving his comrade in charge of his wife, till he should dispose of the booty. The articles being sold, he returned and equally shared the money with his partner in business. By this time report of the robbery had been circulated, and poor Hart, with his companion, was again apprehended and sent to gaol; his wife made her escape in the hour of danger, and consequently saved herself from the misery of a prison. Hart and his colleague were tried for the crime, and sentenced to twelve months in the common gaol, and both to be burned in the hand. Having undergone this punishment, and being once more set at liberty, he then thought that he would proceed to Upper Canada, and there try his fortune in a shanty; with this view, he commenced his journey, but reflecting on the very great hardships he must undergo in getting out lumber, he abandoned the undertaking, and quickly returned to Quebec. He had not been long in town, when he selected another wife, with whom he remained till their little funds were nearly exhausted. Finding himself now in rather a difficult situation, he went out one evening with his new bride, in order to consult what they should do. They wander-

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ed about for some time, till they were at length caught in a very heavy shower of rain, which still added to their misery. Not being able, conveniently, to return home, they went into a tavern and there had some refreshing cordial, with their last shilling; this being spent, they resolved to start home, but from the heavy rain that fell, and the darkness of the night, it seemed almost impossible to accomplished it.

Having at last reached the Batteau Guardhouse, which was at that time unoccupied, Hart and his dearest resolved to lodge there for the night, and quickly made their entrance by breaking through a window. As soon as day made its appearance, Hart went in pursuit of some bitters, which being obtained, he instantly returned to his chosen partner, whom he found comfortably sleeping in the military mansion. But their repose here was but of short duration, for scarcely had Hart re-entered when he was surprised with his loving spouse; taken, and conducted before a Magistrate, and both sentenced to three months' imprisonment in the House of Correction. The time of their commitment having expired, they were again set to their freedom. On leaving gaol, Hart and his wife took different roads, to shift for themselves. After beating about for several days, they accidentally met, at one of the free inns in the Suburbs. Hart was now completely fatigued, and entirely destitute of friends and money. In this deplorable state he applied for a few shillings to his wife, whom he, somehow or other, knew was in possession of a considerable sum. She positively declared that she had not one penny, and still, to his repeated solicitations, persisted in denying. Convinced then that she was not as kind as he could wish, and feeling himself in distress, and denied relief from her whom he had long befriended, and with whom he had spent his last farthing, he soon resolved on an expedient, and that was, to take from her a cloak, for which he had given six dollars. In doing this he told her that he knew she had money and denied it, and therefore he would sell the cloak to relieve himself, and reward her for her falsehood. Hart, laying the cloak over his arm, bade her good-bye. He soon disposed of it, and straightway directed his route to Three-Rivers. On arriving there, he went into a shop, under a pretence of pur-

chasing some little articles, and while the woman was occupied in looking for the different things which he mentioned, Hart very quickly furnished himself with a neat assortment of soft goods, crossed the river to the opposite side, and there peddled his merchandise as he pursued his journey to Montreal.

Shortly after reaching Montreal, he met with an old acquaintance, and with him he went to the United-States, where he sported for some time : but, from bad care and hard living, Hart became very much indisposed, and resolved to return to Canada, with a view of getting into some hospital, where he might recover his impaired health.—After a long and fatiguing journey by land, Hart at length reached Quebec, the scene of all his early follies. The same day that he came into town, his wife had him apprehended for her cloak !—and Hart was once more taken, tried, and committed for twelve months to the common Gaol. At the expiration of the time specified, he was again set adrift, without any advantage but the recovery of his health. He tossed about for several days, till he fell in with one of his late comrades, who was much like himself, both friendless and penniless. Wandering about one night at a late hour, and not knowing where to find lodging without paying for it, and that was entirely out of their power, they resolved to repair to a stable, and rest there, in company with the horses, for the night. This they did, and slept quietly till morning. On the approach of day, Hart began to look around him, and to consider what plan he should first strike out to better his condition. He was now half yielding to despair, when on turning about in the stable, he discovered an old table, which was used for cleaning knives upon. On closely examining it, he found a fork and a piece of soap ; “ these articles,” said he, addressing his companion, “ though but of small value, will still be sufficient to procure us a little bitters.” But on examining further, to his pleasing astonishment, he discovered a small bag quite full of dollars. This was a cheering sight, and had the effect of dispelling the gloom that had pervaded their drooping spirits. No sooner had Hart divided the spoil with his friend, than he set off in pursuit of his old doxy, whom he found in rags and wretchedness ; and notwithstanding her cruelty in punishing

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him for the cloak, poor Hart fitted her out in fine style, and generously forgot and forgave all her past offences.

Hart made quite merry that day, and part of the night, till by the soporiferous influence of grog he bade adieu to care. On waking from his Bacchanalian dream, Hart found himself once more in his old apartment, with all his money gone, which consisted of upwards of one hundred dollars. How or when he came into gaol he could not tell, but there he was, much as he left it. For this *faux pas* he was obliged to remain one month in prison. At the expiration of the month he was again discharged. Nor was he long at liberty before he met with his dear Jane; but not finding it convenient to speak much with her at the moment of meeting, they mutually agreed to see each other at a certain place, at nine o'clock the following morning. Hart was true to his promise, but his wife proved unfaithful; at this trick he was terribly annoyed, and firmly resolved to bring her to an account the very first meeting. Passing through Lewis-street the succeeding evening, he went into a stable for the purpose of lodging for the night; but as the place appeared not to suit his purposes, he soon made his exit, in the mean time taking with him a good fat goose, which he carefully plucked before his departure. He had not been but a few minutes out, when he discovered a woman, walking arm in arm with a bold son of Mars. From the walk and dress of the woman, he conjectured it was his Jane, who, though false, was still dear to him. He watched their route, till they housed snug in a Martial Department in Lewis-street. Love and indignation had now taken such possession of him, that he resolved to stand sentinel, and await her outcoming. After many hours had elapsed, his faithless Jane and her paramour made their appearance. He kept his eye well fixed on the red-coat, till they had fairly passed through John's Gate. "Now for victory and revenge," cried Hart, stepping up and seizing the trembling soldier by the neck; at the same time measuring him across the jaws with the well-plucked goose. Hart and his goose proved an over-match for the soldier and his polished steel. *Bellica Pallas abest!* Having well buffed his martial rival, he then began to dock off his inconstant Jane, whose unceasing screams soon gathered the nocturnal guardians. The well-

bruised rival got making his escape, and Hart said, that was because he had a red coat—(it would be well, if this be the case, always to appear in red)—but Hart and his Jane were both conducted to Gaol. On the following day they were brought up to the Police Office. Hart was ordered to the House of Correction for ten days, and his perfidious spouse for three months; and this terminated his love matters with the faithless and inconstant Jane. His ten days having terminated, off he goes, but as his pocket was light, he prepared to furnish it as speedily as possible, and with that resolution began to have a “look out.” As soon as evening approached, he went to a certain house, resolving to try for something, and if detected, would say that he was a poor man, and wanted a little to eat. In he goes, having first slipped off his shoes, and as every thing appeared to favour his designs, he began to look round him, and soon discovered a fine silver watch; this he seized, and quietly walked his way: he soon disposed of the watch, and made merry as long as the money lasted. Shortly after this, he went one day into a house, in which he was entirely unacquainted—on entering, he found the people busily employed in skinning two fine fat sheep, and remained till part of them was cooked, and he had received share of the roast. Scarcely had he finished his well-relished feast, when he was alarmed by the appearance of constables at the door. Two of the men who were in the house, and Hart, were instantly taken, and sent to Gaol for sheep-stealing; they remained there for ten days, and were afterwards discharged, as no proof could be brought against them. Of stealing the sheep Hart knew nothing, but was very glad to partake of the spoil, although it was actually stolen by the two men who were sent with him to prison. This brush being over, Hart left Gaol, as usual, “without money, and without price;” however, he was resolved not to continue long so. “Any port in time of a storm,” thought Hart, as he approached an old beggarman in Louis Street—after telling the old man that he, and the young lad who accompanied him, had just been liberated from Gaol, he asked the poor old fellow if he could give them any thing to eat—“Arrah, in troth, and that I can,” said the kind old Irishman, and quickly pitched off his budget, and most liberally gave

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them its contents. Having eaten freely of the collected crumbs, they flattered the old man to get them something to drink ; with this he also complied, and straightway sent for a bottle of the best spirits. As soon as the bottle arrived, they went hand in hand to the outside of Lewis Gate, and there sipped the precious beverage, and as the Poet sings, *Oblita corda laborum*, every heart forgot its cares. Hart and his companion took good care to lull the old man to a comfortable sleep, and then emptied his pockets of the few shillings they contained.

The next thing that offered as a *snap*, was a bale of broadcloth, which he and a comrade of his discovered one evening, lying among other goods on the Queen's Wharf ; they kept watch for a fit moment, and then Hart shouldered the cloth. They passed the watch without being apprehended, & pushed their way to the Cap-Rouge Woods. As soon as they arrived there, and quite out of danger, they cut the cloth into small pieces, and peddled it through the country with very good success, and then returned to Quebec, where they spent the money, in all the flow of soul and jovial conviviality, among the free girls of the Suburbs. Hart's hour of sunshine was not very long, for as soon as his money was done, there was no more welcome for Hart among Madam W——'s fair sporters. The first thing that presented itself after this spree was a side of leather, which he saw hanging over a fence in St. John's Suburbs ; this he fastened his eye on, and soon made himself possessor of it ; but here he was not so fortunate as before, for he had scarcely gone far, when he was pursued by a great multitude and deprived of his booty ; yet by the kind intercession of a respectable lady, he got free from the crowd, without any further trouble than the loss of his leather, and consoled himself with saying, in his own mind, that this was the first side he had ever lost, although he had stolen many. Hart wandered about for some days after this, without making any prog ; until his thieving energy was again rekindled by thinking, that he had now another wife, and must provide for her. Away he goes, and shortly returned with several little articles, which relieved their present necessities ; but as this wife was not so easily satisfied as some of his others, and only caressed him when

he had money in his pocket, he soon "slipped her head" and left her to shift for herself. Finding himself now a bachelor, he prepared again to line his pocket, saying, that as soon as he had money he was sure to get a wife. With this impression on his mind, he was walking through St. John-street, when he observed a gentleman alighting from his horse and fastening him with the bridle at a door (a very common practice, among the many unbecoming ones, which may be daily witnessed in Quebec)—up he goes, takes off the saddle, and quietly walked his way. Hart having now recruited his funds, set out to look for another *rib*, and was soon successful in the pursuit;—he declared his love, and the fair Margueritte received his plighted vow. The bridal hour drew nigh, heightened with all the bliss that the imagination can possibly think of. Hart spent a happy night, but was quite surprised to find that in the morning all his money had entirely disappeared; he asked his new bride if she knew any thing of it; she seemed much surprised, and declared that she had not seen any. This was rather an alarming symptom, yet he smoothed down his apprehension till a fit moment should offer. The wished-for opportunity having arrived, Hart carefully examined his suspected wife, and, to his great astonishment, found all his money neatly tied up in the corner of a handkerchief which she had round her neck. He instantly seized the handkerchief which contained his treasure, and then accusing her of perfidy and falsehood, took leave of her for ever. His prospects had now become so bleak in Quebec, that he resolved to leave it, and proceed to Upper Canada; with this intention he commenced his journey, with a heavy heart and a light pocket. He had not gone far when he began to grow fatigued, and not having any means of relieving himself, his misery became doubly increased. From the oppressive heat of the day, he had just seated himself on the road side, leading through the Cap-Rouge-Woods, when a boy came trotting along, carrying a bottle of rum. Hart asked him if he would share it with him, the little boy readily consented, and Hart took a good draught: this affording him temporary relief, and rousing his drooping spirits, he recommenced his travel. As soon as he arrived

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at the Cap-Rouge-Ferry, he made a little stop, and there succeeded in stealing from a shanty several articles which he thought would answer his purposes. He then crossed the Ferry, and soon disposed of the articles; but although his profits in this instance were very considerable, yet he thought they were not sufficient to defray the expenses of his proposed journey, and therefore resolved once more to visit his old burrowing-places in Quebec.

He had not been long in town before he contrived means of adding plentifully to his other store. "Now," said he, "another go for a wife," and instantly set to work. He was also in this case, as before, soon successful in gaining the hand of a fair *Dulcinea*.

Hart's money was his *talisman*, and always proved a most powerful ally in obtaining the hand of a young bride, as soon as his previous mistress should happen to have taken a huff. Having now obtained the hand of *Angelle*, he most freely unlocked his purse, and shared its contents to the very last farthing; but his purse had a bottom, and *Angelle's* love lowered in ratio with the purse. A few days reduced her flame to zero, and left poor Hart more chilly than if he had never felt the inauspicious heat; he bade her farewell, "and swore he would look for another." One night after this, in passing the Upper-Town Market-Place, he met with Mr. Elliot (a person whom he knew not at the time) apparently much intoxicated; Hart spoke to him, and asked him where he lived; Elliot said that he lived at Mr. English's. Hart then accompanied him home, but was quite-surprised to hear his boozing companion declare, before they had finished their glasses, that he had lost some money, and that Hart had taken it, and instantly sent for a Constable. Hart, however, found an opportunity of making his escape, and straightway steered for the Neptune-Tap, leaving his coat in the mean time behind him. He had scarcely entered this retreat, when he was pursued, taken, deprived of all the money he possessed and sent to gaol. He remained in prison till the ensuing assizes, was then tried, found guilty, and sentenced to six months' close imprisonment. Hart, at his very last moments, declared himself entirely inno-

cent of this offence; and the writer of the memoir doubts not, from the corresponding circumstances, which are too tedious to mention, that he was not guilty of the alleged crime. Hart was so much spited at being thus punished, for an offence never committed, that he resolved to break the gaol, and, if possible, to make his escape. At the expiration of three months after his confinement, he succeeded in his design, and effected his escape, in company with two others. His hour of liberty was very short, for on the fourth day after breaking the gaol, he was retaken, about sixty miles from Quebec, in company with his two colleagues.

At the time Hart and his compeers were apprehended, he had in his possession several valuable articles which had been previously stolen from the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Quebec. This led to a strong and reasonable supposition that Hart was concerned in the robbery. He was consequently brought to trial, and after a minute investigation of every particular connected with the disgraceful and sacrilegious act, Hart was found *guilty*, and sentenced to be hanged on the tenth day of November, 1826.

While he was under the sentence of death, the writer of this memoir took every opportunity of visiting him, and was often deeply affected by the different changes which were easily traced in his countenance. To one who had never before witnessed the like, these appearances were in the highest degree affecting; to sit and contemplate in a gloomy cell the various workings of a mind labouring under the painful certainty of a disgraceful death—at one moment half-willing to die; at another, flattering himself with the hope of pardon—could not fail to awaken in the heart every feeling that compassion and misery are capable of exciting; the clanking of his iron chains, as he restlessly moved from corner to corner in his narrow dungeon—the broken sigh, and the story of his misfortune;—all conspired to increase the most distressing and heart-rending sensations. He willingly acknowledged his numerous crimes, and hoped that his death would be a wholesome warning to all young men, who heedlessly run the race of profligacy

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and wickedness, unmindful of the sacred duties which they owe to God, their Heavenly Father, "whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and whose paths are peace." He declared his firm belief in the mercies of a redeeming Saviour, and said that he was not afraid to die, since by Christ's death a sufficient sacrifice has been offered for the sins of the world. He seemed quite reconciled to meet his fate; and although, at times, he manifested by his looks and actions the great distress that laboured in his breast, yet he supported himself with a bravery and strength of feeling, which could alone spring from a consciousness of having made his peace with a just, a benignant, and a merciful God.

The night previous to his execution he slept but little, and talked much of his follies and his crimes. He said his life had been one continued scene of misfortune and wickedness, and that he had now no wish to live. He recounted, while leaning on his iron bed, all the robberies he had ever committed, which amounted to about *sixty-three*! but still most firmly and solemnly denied having been, in any shape, concerned in the robbery of the Roman Catholic Cathedral. He owned that he had received the stolen articles from one Butterworth, an old offender. He said he was very willing to resign his life; but that he would die innocent of the crime for which he was about to suffer.

The awful moment having arrived, Hart was brought out for execution, and after briefly addressing the collected multitude and hoping that his death would be a sufficient warning to all young men, and begging the prayers of every individual who witnessed his miserable end; he gave the signal for the drop to fall, and in one instant was relieved from a world in which he had, by his own folly and crimes, tasted nothing but misery, vice and wretchedness.